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Festival!
Ideas for community
festival organizers
prepared by
Festival Ontario





Ministry of
Culture and
Recreation

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Introduction

This booklet is published as a practical guide for community festival organizers.

Its purpose is to provide ideas and share factual information about the organization of community festivals based on the experience of other community festival organizers.

For convenience, the contents are organized under the following headings.

- **Community support**
- **Organization**
- **Program**
- **Revenue and expenses**
- **Promotion and publicity**
- **Administration**
- **Festival Ontario**

Festival Ontario is a program of the Government of Ontario which makes the resources of provincially-funded cultural organizations available to community festivals throughout the province. Details of the Festival Ontario program are given in the final section of this booklet.

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Community Support

Why should a community stage a festival? Besides being fun, festivals have provided a number of other important benefits to Ontario communities that have held them.

Festivals increase community spirit and pride.

They allow communities to share their uniqueness with people from other areas.

They provide an opportunity for people in the community to discover and develop their cultural skills and talents.

They expose people in the community to new ideas and concepts in drama, music, art and other creative forms. This can have the lasting effect of increased local activity, discovery and exploration in the arts.

They give the community a chance to share in Ontario's cultural resources.

They help a community grow and prosper by attracting dollars to it in the form of tourism and new business.

Clearly some festivals are more successful than others because they are real community projects. They involve as many people as possible from as many different segments of the community as possible.

Groups and individuals involved in community festivals have included:

- **The mayor.**
- **Members of the town or city council.**
- **The member of the provincial legislature.**
- **The member of the federal parliament.**
- **The police chief.**
- **The fire chief.**
- **School principals.**

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- Teachers.
 - Administrators of universities, colleges and other educational institutions.
 - Home and School Associations.
 - Student councils.
 - Youth groups such as 4H Clubs.
 - Religious groups and leaders.
 - Publishers and editors of newspapers.
 - Owners and managers of radio and television stations.
 - The regional representative of Ontario's Ministry of Culture and Recreation
 - The field representative of Ontario's Ministry of Industry and Tourism.
 - Librarians.
 - Art gallery directors.
 - Museum directors.
 - Theatre groups.
 - Music societies.
 - Directors of historical buildings or sites.
 - Writers, artists and performers who live in the area.
 - Other groups involved in cultural activities.
 - Regional offices of the Canadian Guild of Crafts, The Canadian National Institute for the Blind, and other organizations involved in crafts.
 - Local crafts people.
 - Bankers.
 - Lawyers.
 - Doctors and dentists.
 - Other professional people.
 - Leading businessmen and women (Chamber of Commerce).
 - The Lions Club, the Rotary Club and other service organizations in the community.
 - YMCA, YWCA, YMHA, leaders.
 - Senior citizens' groups.
 - Salesmen for major companies who call on distributors or retailers in the community. (Example: Major breweries have regional sales people who often have time and funds to spend on community projects.)
 - Major companies who market their products in the community.



Organization

Ask anyone who has ever been involved in organizing a community festival and you'll hear the same thing over and over again—the better the festival organization, the better the festival's chance of success.

Most community festivals appoint a board of directors. It's composed of people who have the interest, ability and time to devote to the organization of a festival.

Obviously, the chairperson should have the kind of leadership qualities which can weld the board into an effective working unit.

All other members of the board generally take on the responsibility for a specific aspect of the festival—finance, program, publicity and promotion, advertising and sales, administration and organization—and committees are formed under them.

Among the early and important decisions the board usually makes are the following:

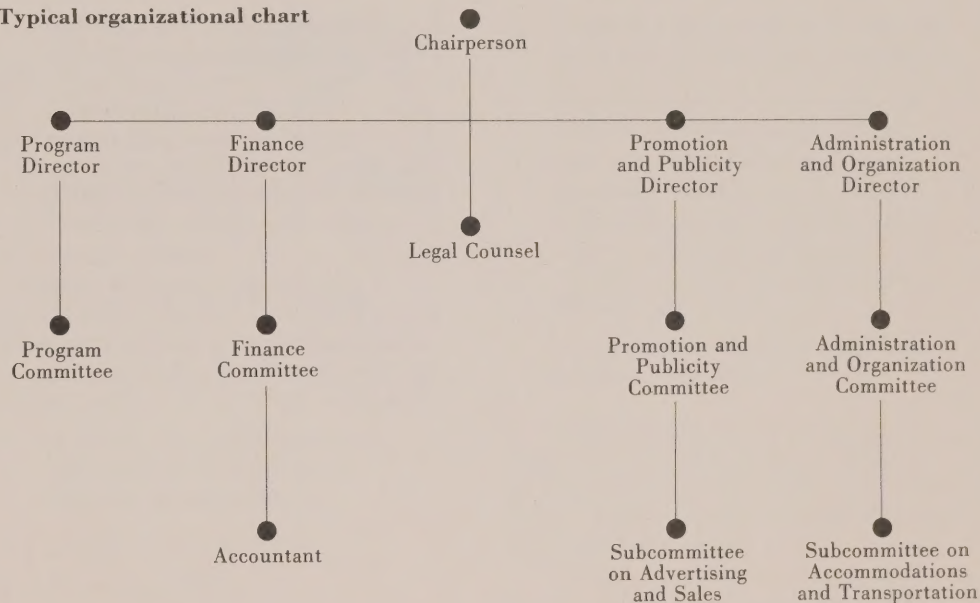
- **Whether or not to incorporate the festival formally and legally.** This is a complex question requiring competent legal advice. (Example: The board of the Algoma Fall Festival became chartered as the Algoma Arts Festival Association. The charter was received through the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, and the Association was registered as a charitable organization for income tax purposes with the Department of Revenue Canada Taxation.)
- **The theme of the festival.** Generally speaking, the best themes are those which have local significance. (Examples: Cobalt, with a colourful history dating back to the days of the silver rush, chose mining as the theme of its festival. Petrolia, where North America's oil industry began, chose oil as its theme and presented a new play on that subject in its restored Opera House. Peter-

borough took advantage of a beautiful natural setting with its Arts and Water Festival.)

- **The size and scope of the festival.** Some festivals are held for just three or four days over a holiday weekend. Others go on for several weeks or a month. The size and scope of a festival depends largely on local capabilities and interest and on the ambitions of the board. Usually it is best to start with a smaller festival the first year, expanding it in succeeding years.

- The dates of the festival. These should be chosen carefully, keeping in mind weather conditions and competing attractions. (Example: no one would schedule a festival for the weeks of the Stanley Cup finals.)
- Setting of broad guidelines regarding finance, program, publicity and promotion, administration and organization, etc. Directors responsible for these areas are generally expected to operate within the guidelines established by the board and report back to the board regularly on their progress.

Typical organizational chart





Program

Organizers agree that the most important single ingredient for a successful festival is the program itself. They say it is extremely important that a dynamic program director be appointed and that he or she have a committee of hard-working, imaginative people who are committed to the success of the festival.

A good program generally includes a mix of activities — cultural, historical, recreational and pure entertainment—to appeal to the interests of all people in the community.

A good program, too, usually involves as many groups and individuals within the community as possible — artists, writers, musicians, performers, etc. Ask them how they might best contribute to the festival.

Individuals and cultural groups from outside the community may also be included in the program.

Exhibits and events available under the auspices of Festival Ontario are described in the final section of this guide.

Through the Ontario Arts Council, a list of Ontario professional touring arts resources is available. OAC's address is 151 Bloor Street West, Toronto M5S 1T6. Telephone (416) 961-1660. Ask for their OnTour kit.

You may also want to explore the possibility of including talented groups and individuals from neighbouring communities, and even from outside the province or country. Information about the latter may be obtained from the Touring Office of The Canada Council, 151 Sparks Street, Ottawa K1P 5V8.

Following are activities which other festivals have included in their programs:

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- **Opening ceremonies.** These might include short speeches by the chairperson, the mayor, the MP, the MPP, other dignitaries and invited guests.
 - **Theatrical plays.**
 - **Music concerts of all types** – classical, contemporary, choral, opera, folk, jazz, rock, etc.
 - **Performances by dancers and dance companies.**
 - **A film festival.**
 - **Art exhibitions** – one man shows, group shows of painting and sculpture, etc.
 - **Craft exhibitions.**
 - **Children's art workshops and exhibits.**
 - **Fashion shows.**
 - **Tours of historical sites.**
 - **Parades of historical costumes.**
 - **Exhibitions of photography.**
 - **Puppet shows.**
 - **Lectures by writers, artists and performers on their work.**
 - **Garden tours and parties.**
 - **Special television shows.**
 - **Science exhibits and demonstrations.**
 - **Book exhibits.**
 - **Events for senior citizens.**
 - **Events and exhibits by various ethnic groups in the community.**
 - **Athletic competitions and demonstrations for both children and adults.**
 - **Mime presentations.**
 - **Museum tours.**
 - **Street dances.**
 - **A beer-fest.**
 - **A picnic in the park.**
 - **Parades.**
 - **Hobby exhibits. Stamp and coin collections. Model building. Etc.**
 - **A display or presentation about the history of the community.**
 - **A special event tied in to local industries.** (Example: If the community produces large quantities of cheese, a cheese and wine party might be held to let people sample many different kinds of cheese from all over the world.)
 - **Special inter-denominational religious services.**

Obviously this list by no means exhausts the possible program activities for a community festival. The program director and committee will undoubtedly have many other ideas.

Once the program activities have been decided, it is generally advisable to schedule them in such a way that each day of the festival has something of interest to virtually everyone in the community. It is also advisable to schedule events so that they do not compete with each other for the same audience.



Revenue and expenses

The director who is responsible for finance, and all members of his or her committee, have one of the least glamorous but most vital functions to perform.

The people chosen should logically be those who have had some experience in fund-raising and some success in business. Generally speaking, the best people for the jobs are bankers, insurance agents, accountants, business people and those who have been active in successful drives for the United Way and other charities.

The finance committee is generally responsible for preparing a budget for the festival for the approval of the board of directors. The budget includes all anticipated revenues and expenses, and provides for contingencies. Many festival organizers warn against unrealistically optimistic forecasts for contributions and box office revenue when drawing up a budget.

Following are some major sources of revenue and expenses:

Sources of revenue

Grants from the municipal government.

Grants from the Ontario government.

—Ontario Arts Council


—grants to festival organizations

—grants to sponsors of touring performing arts events through the Touring Arts Fund.

Grants from the Canadian government.

—Canada Council.

—Department of the Secretary of State.



Grants from private foundations and corporations. Many of these are listed in the Canadian Directory to Foundations and Other Granting Agencies, which is available from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. A number of companies also have foundations which provide grants for some arts projects.

Fund-raising events.

- Contributions from local businesses.
- Contributions from local clubs and organizations.
- Door-to-door canvassing.
- Admissions to festival attractions.
- Profits on sales of food and drink during festival.
- Program advertisements.

Sources of expense

Professional fees of artists, performers, etc.

Expense payments to non-professional artists, performers, etc.

Rental fees for halls and other facilities not donated to festival.

Renovations or decorations to festival facilities.

Advertising and promotion (10-15 per cent of total projected revenue).

Hospitality and entertainment for special guests.

Salaries of non-volunteer workers and technicians.

Contingencies.

It is the responsibility of the finance committee to make sure the festival's books are set up properly and that records of all expenses and revenues are recorded diligently. If a chartered accountant is a member of the committee, this job would logically be given to him or her. If not, it is generally advisable to hire the services of an accountant both to set up the books and to do an audit of them after the festival.



Promotion and publicity

Much of the success of a community festival depends on the ability of the publicity and promotion director and committee to let people know about the festival and generate enthusiasm for it.

Other festival organizers have found that no matter how imaginative the festival program, and no matter how well organized the business aspects of the festival, if people don't know about it and aren't enthused about it, the festival won't succeed.

Following are a number of techniques which publicity and promotion people at other festivals have employed successfully.

- **Speeches to local church groups, service clubs, home and school organizations and others, telling them about plans for the festival.**
- **Establish liaison with people in the local media – newspapers, radio and television stations – and arrange for stories about the festival to be printed or broadcast at suitable intervals.**
- **Hold news conferences for the local media to inform them of important news about the festival.**
- **Prepare and distribute news releases, preferably accompanied by interesting photographs, not only for local media but also for media in surrounding areas. Releases can be about a new attraction which has been scheduled for the festival, another site chosen for a festival event, etc. (It is best not to announce the full**

program of the festival all at one time, but rather to make separate announcements about each program event at regular intervals.)

- **Arrange to have programs designed and printed. The best programs show exactly what events are taking place each day of the festival – when and where. They also give credit to all those who have contributed – money, time or services – to the festival.**
- **Stage a press preview of the festival, a day or two before it begins.**
- **Have posters designed and printed, and arrange for them to be displayed throughout the community and in surrounding areas.**

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- **Create brochures, pamphlets or flyers and arrange to have them distributed door-to-door or by mail to all households in the community and to selected households in surrounding areas.**
 - **Arrange for local businesses to help promote the festival – publicity items about the festival on locally-produced products, books of matches publicizing the festival distributed through local tobacconists, place-mats publicizing the festival in local restaurants, etc.**
 - **When a local television station does feature stories on the festival, it may be possible to get videotape copies and distribute them to stations in surrounding areas.**
 - **Get press releases and photographs – better still, press kits – from all cultural organizations participating in the festival, and distribute them to media in your community and surrounding areas. (Through Festival Ontario, the committee can obtain publicity materials about all events and exhibits appearing under Festival Ontario auspices.)**
 - **Create and place advertising in newspapers, on radio and on television – both locally and in neighbouring areas. Generally it is best to concentrate advertising in the two weeks prior to the festival and during the festival itself.**
 - **Arrange for a local photographer to record all events at the festival. These photographs will provide news items during the festival and will prove extremely useful in succeeding years.**

The timing of promotion and publicity activities is of great importance. It is usually recommended that the committee prepare a schedule of activities so that they are executed in logical sequence and enough lead time is allowed for preparing and organizing each phase.

In addition to supplying promotional materials about events and exhibits appearing under its auspices, Festival Ontario is prepared to respond to requests for information and assistance about how best to handle promotional and publicity opportunities and problems as they arise. Festival Ontario will also attempt to arrange publicity about a community festival in another part of the province, if asked to do so. (Example: Listings in "Things To Do" columns in major newspapers and magazines.)

Administration

A director and committee are generally appointed to be responsible for festival administration and organization. They make sure everything runs smoothly. Experience has shown that the best people for this committee are those who have demonstrated strong organizational and administrative ability in business or community activities.

Generally, their responsibilities include the following:

- **Arrange facilities to accommodate all festival attractions and events. Some facilities that might be considered include shopping centres, theatres and cinemas, church and school halls, parks, museums, galleries, libraries, banks, empty warehouses and barns, car dealer showrooms, vacant areas of office buildings, streets which can be closed off to traffic, lobbies of apartment buildings, vacant lots and stores, and store front windows.**
- **Arrange for any necessary renovations or decorations to be done to facilities.**
- **Get necessary permits and arrange with the police for closing off streets and the manning of attractions, where necessary.**
- **Make sure the community has adequate facilities available for out-of-town visitors. Places to stay, eat, park and so on. Some festivals have found it advantageous to appoint a separate committee or sub-committee to take responsibility for accommodations and transportation.**
- **Set up a child care centre with lots of creative “fun” things for children to do while their parents enjoy the cultural events and attractions.**
- **Recruit volunteer and paid workers to prepare and staff all attractions and events – ticket-takers, ushers, carpenters, painters, electricians, etc.**
- **Resolve the logistical problems of moving people and equipment from one place to another.**
- **Set up box offices. Likely, these would be in stores and businesses in the community and neighbouring areas.**

Festival Ontario will be pleased to provide any additional assistance it can – for instance, by advising how other communities have handled problems of an administrative or organizational nature.



Festival Ontario

Festival Ontario was established in 1973 by the Government of Ontario. It is an important part of the Government's policy to decentralize the cultural resources of the province, making them available to communities in any part of Ontario.

Through Festival Ontario, organizers of community festivals and celebrations can obtain, free of charge, a wide variety of cultural exhibitions and events. Also free of charge, they can get assistance in the form of organizational, administrative and promotional expertise.

It should be emphasized that Festival Ontario is not designed to take over local festivals. Its function is purely advisory and supportive. It acts as an intermediary between community festival organizers and the major cultural organizations of the province, bringing the two together where possible.

Following are some of the cultural organizations whose participation may be obtained through Festival Ontario:

- **Archives of Ontario.**
This organization may be able to provide an exhibition of historical material that would tie in with the festival's theme. Or it may be able to assemble an exhibit about the history of your community.
- **Art Gallery of Ontario.**
It may be able to provide exhibitions of traditional and contemporary painting and sculpture, both Canadian and foreign. It may also be able to help organize artists' workshops or special exhibits of art linked to your community. (Example: For the Friendship Festival in the town of Simcoe, August 1974, AGO mounted a major exhibit of contemporary sculpture on the grounds of the town's new arts centre.)
- **The Historical and Museums Branch of the Ministry of Culture and Recreation.**
It may be able to provide assistance to the local museum for a special exhibit during the Festival. Also available from the Branch is a travelling version of the Our Parliamentary Heritage exhibit at the Parliament Building in Toronto. The travelling exhibit includes copies of documents, pictures, maps, newspapers, drawings and other items illustrating the establishment and development of the British parliamentary system of justice, and how this was established and works in Ontario.
- **The McMichael Canadian Collection.**
Reproductions of Group of Seven paintings from this important collection may be


available for a special exhibition. (Example: Nine Group of Seven paintings of Algoma Landscapes were exhibited along with paintings from the Art Gallery of Ontario at the Algoma Fall Festival, 1973.)

- **Ontario Educational Communications Authority.** This educational television network may be able to help local television people or film makers produce a record of the festival. It may be able to mount displays or conduct workshops on videotape and television production. And

through its station in Toronto and future transmitters in Paris, London, Chatham, Windsor and Ottawa, it may be able to help promote your festival via "billboards". (Example: OECA helped local television people produce a documentary film about the 1973 Algoma Fall Festival in Sault Ste. Marie. The film has since been shown on local television and over Channel 19, Toronto.)

- **Ontario Science Centre.** It may be able to provide its travelling show, The Ontario Science Centre Circus, a mini-film exhibit with displays and demonstrations on scientific subjects. (Example: The Ontario Science Centre Circus was a major attraction at Artsfest '74 in Owen Sound.)

- **Ontario Film Theatre.** This organization can provide Canadian-made and foreign films for a film festival. (Example: A film Festival of Laughter was organized for the Guelph Spring Festival, 1974.)
- **Ontario Heritage Foundation.** Travelling art exhibits may be available from the Foundation's Firestone Collection of Canadian art. The Foundation may also be able to organize exhibits and lectures on the preservation of historic buildings and areas.
- **Royal Botanical Gardens.** It may be available to organize lectures and events on botanical and horticultural subjects and provide programs in nature interpretation. A pictorial exhibit is available depicting how botanical gardens can serve a community. (Example: For Petrolia's festival the RBG



presented an illustrated lecture on local flora, and conducted field trips for bird watchers and to explore the area's vegetation and plant life.)

- **Royal Ontario Museum.** Two museumobiles are available by arrangement, each of them self-contained and ready for visitors. "Man in Ontario" looks at man's first 12,000 years in the province. "Fossils of Ontario" provides a two billion year record of Ontario as revealed through its rocks. ROM also has the "Civilization" film series available for loan. And it can often arrange for demonstrations, lectures and special exhibits, on request. (Example: ROM set up a special display at the Simcoe County Museum as part of Georgian Festival '74 in Barrie.)

- **Ontario Arts Council.** Through OAC you may obtain information on the vast array of arts activities in the province. The free OnTour kit lists touring arts resources in the fields of music, dance, theatre, visual arts and Franco-Ontarian resources. Associated cultural institutions may be able to provide exhibits and workshops on lighting, costumes, props, box office, etc. The Council may also be able to arrange exhibits or events by other organizations and individuals involved in publishing, photography, the visual arts, puppetry, writing and the performing arts.

The level and type of participation in a community festival by each of these organizations is flexible. It is tailored to the particular wants and needs of each individual festival.

For further information or assistance write to:

Festival Ontario

Ministry of Culture and Recreation
Queen's Park, Toronto
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Robert Welch, Minister
Malcolm Rowan, Deputy Minister

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